

**Unsettled Imaginings:  
Australian Novels of Asian Invasion**

**by**

**Catriona Ross B.A. (Hons)**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines novels that depict an imaginary invasion of Australia by an Asian country. It argues that novels of Asian invasion constitute a distinct body of formulaic literature – a subgenre – within the field of Australian popular fiction. This study undertakes a formative mapping of the subgenre of Asian invasion novels in three ways. It assembles the corpus of texts and provides an annotated bibliography. It delineates the generic form and content of the novels and monitors the resilience and evolution of the subgenre through changing historical and cultural contexts. It considers the ideological implications of the Asian invasion narrative through readings of race, nation and gender.

The first novels of Asian invasion, which established the conventions of the subgenre, were produced during the period of intense nation building immediately before and after the federation of Australia in 1901. The explicit ideological project of these novels was to awaken white Australia to the threat Asia posed to its fledgling nationhood. This initial anxious literary production activated a detailed set of discourses centring on Australian vulnerability and Asian menace that endure to the present day. Generic invasion novels are alarmist, didactic texts that call for a massive strengthening of national defence by illustrating the ease with which Australia could be invaded under the present circumstances. In order to fulfil this pedagogic agenda the texts are often meticulously realist, but are at the same time complete fantasy, for they document not an actual but an imaginary war. This study contends that invasion novels bring together science fiction narrative structures, adventurous plots and realist literary strategies to construct a vehicle for the political ideology of Asian threat.

The thesis charts the development of the subgenre from its inception in 1888 to the present time and locates thirty novels in all. A survey of the subgenre as a whole complements the detailed analysis of specific novels. It argues that these novels are primarily the same dystopian tale of the loss of white Australia told time and time again. On a subtextual level, Australia's very fixation with the fiction of Asian invasion generates a cultural significance of its own. This study explores how the compulsive retelling of the generic prophesy of Asian invasion implicitly suggests specifically white cultural anxieties stemming from Australia's status as a relatively new settler society, itself born of invasion.

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## Illustrations

- Figure 1. Cover of the *Bulletin*, 9 October 2007.
- Figure 2. Cover of *The Battle of Mordialloc* by Edward Maitland, 1888.
- Figure 3. Cover of *The Awakening* by G.D. Mitchell, 1937.
- Figure 4. Cover of *Fools' Harvest* by Erle Cox, 1939.
- Figure 5. "Wake, Australia! Wake!" Cover of the *Boomerang*, 11 February 1888.
- Figure 6. "To the Rescue." Illustration from "White or Yellow?" by William Lane, *Boomerang* 14 April 1888: 9.
- Figure 7. Cover of the 2003 scholarly edition of *The Yellow Wave* by Kenneth Mackay, originally published in 1895.
- Figure 8. "The Unfinished Commonwealth." Cover of the *Lone Hand*, 1 February 1909.
- Figure 9. Cover of *Below the Line* by Eric Willmot, 1991.
- Figure 10. Cover of *The Bush Soldiers* by John Hooker, 1984.
- Figure 11. Cover of *The Invasion* by John Hay, 1968.
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- Figure 14. Tall Ship/Boat People image.
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Invasion of successional mature, undisturbed communities usually requires that the alien taxon overcomes a different category of barriers. We propose that the term "invasive"™ should be used without any inference to environmental or economic impact. Terms like "pests"™ and "weeds"™ are suitable labels for the 50-80% of invaders that have harmful effects.